An
Inaugural Essay;

On
The Influence
of
Diet, Drefs, and Amusements
upon health;

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Essay

By

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The Medical faculty are entrusted with the lives and health of their fellow creatures, and are responsible for the faithful discharge of duties devolving upon them as guardians of the public health. The object of the profession is to cure and prevent disease; and since this is the case, the attainment of so laudable an end ought in no wise to be defeated, by neglecting to censure the follies of gay and thoughtless youth, as well as to correct the errors of those of a more mature age. The influence of Physicians in Society is more or less extensive, and should be exerted to the utmost in the promotion of health and happiness, by reforming errors, reproving folly, and discountenancing vice & immorality.

We shall proceed, without further prefatory remarks, to consider, in a cursory manner, the influence of Diet, Dress and Amusements, upon the health of the present generation.

Diet.

No one cause of disease produces effects more injurious or extensive than unwholesome or improper diet. An article of food, if used without discretion may be productive of disease; whilst, taken properly, it may add strength and vigour to the constitution; or it may produce unpleasant or injurious effects in one person, whilst in another it may prove altogether innocuous, or rather wholesome & nourishing. These effects of diet, so discrepant in different individuals, or in the same individual at different times, depend, in part, on idiosyncrasy, in part on the state of the system, but most of all, on the distorted and unnatural character of whatever is served up in the shape of food.

The intention of the Creator was, evidently, that man should derive his means of subsistence from the animal as well as vegetable king

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dom; this we infer from the structure of the human frame, besides having direct proof of it in revelation. The more simple are the articles of nourishment, the more do they contribute to health, comfort, and longevity. In support of this proposition we have but to look back at the antediluvians, and contemplate the instances of extreme old age there to be met with. Society was then in a simple state; and refinement, with the Hydra-headed monster Luxury, had not yet made its appearance. When the wickedness of man became great upon the Earth, human life was shortened.+ Pris au déluge se rangent le décroissement de la vie humaine; le changement dans le boire, et une nouvelle nourriture substituée aux fruits de la terre. The mode of living among the Aborigines of our own country, goes, also, to show the salutary tendency of simplicity in diet— their meat being the flesh of

+ Bossuet- L'histoire universelle—

animals killed in the chase, or fish taken from lakes and rivers, whilst their sole drink is the only beverage provided for man by the hand of Nature. Where do we find a people that can equal these children of the wilderness in enduring hunger and thirst, cold and heat, or excessive fatigue in any undertaking? But mark the change in their physical as well as moral nature, on the introduction of the habits of the white man, unless Christianity, at the same time, diffuse its benign influence among them.

To draw proofs from those a little more nearly related to ourselves, we find none better suited to our purpose than the Pilgrims, the ancient settlers of N. England. Correct, and even rigid, in their habits of morality, and compelled to subsist on the most homely fare, and accustomed to vigorous exercise, they enjoyed that health and ener-

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gy, both of body and mind, which their degenerate offspring, at this day, little dream of. Were we to seek for evidence still stronger, we have but to bring the subject directly home, and contrast the two classes found among ourselves; to wit, the rich and the poor. The rich use that diet which may be chosen by a capricious appetite, or which fancy may dictate, while the poor use that which may be demanded by Nature or which circumstances allow. The countenance of a person will, at a mere glance, indicate to which class he belongs, as well as point out the degree of health and constitutional vigour that he enjoys. The indigent but temperate labourer has the glow of health upon his cheek, while the wealthy and luxurious has, generally speaking, an artificial freshness of countenance, or a complexion faded and sallow. It does not follow as a necessary consequence, that, because a man is

rich he must be a glutton or wine-bibber—but "man is the creature of circumstance", and those who have it in their power often yield themselves up to the indulgence of every vagrant appetite and passion.

"Dapes jubent et sublata reponi pocula—"
"Nunc vino pellite curas— atque benignius
Deprome quadrimum Sabinâ,
O Thaliarche, merum diotâ."

Such is the festive song of these bon vivants, till some unwelcome visiter, in the guise of Gout or Dyspepsia, changes their notes of hilarity into the more lengthened strains of sadness.

The diet of the two sexes is different, and so are the diseases to which each sex is obnoxious. Many among the male sex are accustomed to taking in no very small quantity, solid food of different dishes—highly spiced, and agreeably flavoured, that the pleasures of the taste may be prolonged after

the demands of hunger are satisfied. The overloaded stomach now requires aid in digesting its contents; and brandy or wine, or both, are taken, as being the best solvents of this heterogeneous compound — or rather, as being stimulants most appropriate to the case. Such delicate and complicated organs as are concerned in the process of digestion cannot long endure the preternatural task imposed on them, and the constant goading and stimulating to which they are subject. As a consequence of this mode of living, engorgement of some vital organ, or a low degree of inflammation of some one viscus, is, sooner or later, sure to ensue — hence, a host of diseases, well known in this civilized and enlightened age, under the names of Gout, Dyspepsia, Dropsy etc.

The diet of females, unlike that of the other sex, consists in a great measure of pastry, sweetmeats, and other articles of this class, than which nothing

ing taken into the stomach is more indigestible or less nutritive; and this is more especially true if the constitution be feeble and delicate. The sedentary life of most females predisposes them to numerous complaints peculiar to the sex; and the diet of which they make use tends to excite some of these complaints into action, while it increases the susceptibility of the system to others. Their drinks too are relaxing and debilitating, and as unwholesome as their food; hot tea and coffee being their principal beverage. Thus, instead of a rosy cheek and laughing lip, among the sisterhood, we find a countenance sorrowful and wearing the paleness of the lily.

Every country and every clime have been ransacked for something that may please the dainty palates of our modern Epicureans. The daily and most common meals of

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the great majority of people at this day are composed of the products of different quarters of the globe. Nearly every article of our diet is artificial, both food and drink. The ingenuity of man has been tortured to discover some new product, or some new combination, that might gratify a fastidious appetite. Our most delicious fruits, and even our most valuable and nutritious grains, have been made to yield an intoxicating liquor — a poison that has destroyed countless thousands, and a curse nearly as grievous and almost as much to be dreaded by our happy country, as were, in ancient times, the plagues to be feared by Egypt.

Dress.

Another cause of frequent ill health in both sexes, but more particularly in the female, is to be found in dress. The tyrant Fashion rules with such despotism at this day, that, scarcely

is there to be found a ready listner to the dictates of nature and reason. The votaries of Fashion sacrifice not only ease and comfort at the shrine of their sovereign, but even health and life are made to pay the forfeit of their folly and weakmindedness. Were the evils, flowing from this source, confined alone to the gay and thoughtless youth, our bills of mortality would not be so alarmingly swelled as they now are. When the faded and wrinkled matron aspires to add new charms to her person, and grace to her time-worn form, we are compelled to pity her weakness, and lament the degeneracy "of these latter times". Maid and Matron alike desire to flourish in immortal youth; the mother lays aside the dress becoming her age and condition, and arrays herself, like the daughter, according to the prevailing fashion in the Beau monde.

The time has been when people wore that dress which best comported with convenience and comfort, and their pecuniary circumstances—

——————"But we have bid farewell
To all the virtues of those better days,
And all their honest pleasures."

To fashion, so far as it is not incompatible with health or comfort, it may be expedient to submit; but in truth, there are no limits to its sway over the minds of many of our, otherwise, most valued females. The youthful damsel is taught to attire herself in such a manner as may best exhibit a graceful form, or display the charms of her person. She early learns the duties of the toilette, and, instead of being engaged in some healthful, domestic employment, spends her time before

—"the mirror, where the ravished maid,
Beholds and loves her own reflected shade."

Much, very much has been said and written upon the subject of tight lacing; but too much cannot be said till the evil is eradicated, till the fashion is exploded, and it shall be as customary among ladies to go unbusked, as it is now considered genteel to live legist with hickory and whalebone.

Among our Indian women we find no instances of tight-lacing; of course, we find among them none of the evils resulting from a habit so repugnant to nature; whilst in beauty and elegance of form, they are not surpassed by any of their civilized and refined contemporaries. The less fashionable part of the female world are in the possession of good health and a fine flow of spirits. Instead of a form delicate and slender, theirs exhibits the strength and vigour of nature in feminine simplicity and loveliness; and instead of a pallid, sickly countenance, the hue of health is imprint

ed on their cheeks, and their tout ensemble indicates a freedom from disease.

By compressing the thoracic viscera, tight-lacing impedes respiration and the free transmission of blood thro' the lungs hence pulmonic affections. The abdominal viscera also suffer; the portal circulation becomes languid and obstructed, congestions in the various organs ensue, and a numerous train of diseases are the consequence.

Dress is faulty, not only as regards the manner of wearing it, but also in respect to quantity and quality. "The dress of females is an inadequate security against the weather at all seasons, but especially in the winter and spring. It is surely a great defect in education, that young women should be taught such an unseating regard to the decoration of their persons, and to the external polish of the mere exteri-

our; for by adherence to this system, simplicity of manner, sincerity of mind, and even health are often sacrificed". In selecting articles of clothing convenience and comfort are not taken into account — at least there are not, as they ought to be, considerations of primary importance. If the stuff be only fashionable, new, and gay, nothing farther is required — the "summum bonum" of the whole consisting in the display of a stylish exterior.

When we compare the two sexes, the result will be, that, of the two, the female will be found to be the weaker and more delicate; therefore the health of woman should be more carefully watched over, and her system more effectually shielded from the causes that produce disease.

Nothing, in this region of country, is so destructive to life and health as sudden atmos-

spherical vicissitudes; and every change in the weather is allowed to exert the whole of its sad influence by not guarding against its effects in paying due attention to dress. our ladies will not increase the quantity of their wearing apparel lest they appear too masculine, and in their opinion, cease to please and be charming in the eyes of the other sex. Alas, this fatal misapprehension! when shall reason and common sense be seated upon the throne that has been so long usurped by Fashion and Folly?

Women, confined as they necessarily are within doors, leading a sedentary life, and taking little or no vigorous exercise, are like feeble and sickly plants— they need shelter from the storm and protection from the winter's cold. But man, inured from his cradle to hardship and fatigue, and subject from his infancy to

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all variations of temperature from high to low, and vice versa, is like the sturdy oak — he can endure the wintry blasts of the north, or suffer the peltings of the pitiless storm, with impunity.

Woman too was destined to move in a certain sphere; and having a constitution given her peculiarly fitted to answer the end designed, why should we seek to impose on her greater burdens than she can well sustain? But the strength of her system is oftentimes too severely tasked, especially by being made to encounter the cold of winter and spring when not sufficiently protected by clothing.

At these seasons of the year the quantity of clothing worn by females is not more than half that worn by the other sex — which is exactly the reverse of what it should be. Why does not the experienced mother supply her shivering daughter with an additional garment?

A very warm drap within doors would pro-

duce enervation and debility in either sex, by habituating the system to a high temperature, thereby increasing the insensible perspiration. But on going from a heated apartment into a cold one, or into the open air, those leading a sedentary life and not much accustomed to such changes should never fail to add to their ordinary dress an extra garment. The thin stockings and shoes worn now-a-days, particularly by the ladies, but poorly protect the lower extremities against the cold of a winter's day, while the arms, neck, and breast, are still more exposed to a chilling atmosphere. Coughs and consumptions will continue to cull the fairest flowers from society, and make sad inroads on domestic bliss, while <u>prunella shoes</u> are worn upon a damp, cold, and even wet pavement.

Every person, old and young, male and female, in our variable climate, and in our artifi-

cial state of society ought to wear next the skin, at least six or seven months in the year, an envelope of flannel or fleecy hosiery. However disagreeable this may seem at first, a few days are sufficient to remedy the inconvenience, and make such a dress extremely pleasant.

Flannel, being a bad conductor of caloric, retains the heat of the body, and prevents those changes in the temperature next the surface that would occur without this envelope. Some females, in the simplicity of their hearts, or from ~~mere~~ affectation of delicacy, may object to this mode of dress; but unless they wish the canker worm, disease, to feed upon their damask cheek, some of their mistaken notions cannot be too soon eradicated. Every female, who either walks or rides out in the cold season of the year, ought to wear worsted stockings, worsted, flannel, or deer skin drawers, and

socks over their shoes. A duff of this sort, besides keeping the whole surface of an equable temperature, promotes and supports the insensible perspiration, so necessary to health and a buoyancy of spirits.

Amusements.

Among the numerous causes that sap the foundation of a healthy constitution, and induce disease and premature decay, are the various amusements much in vogue among the young of both sexes. Some of these operate directly on the body producing functional derangement of some vital organ; or their effect may be produced indirectly upon the body thro' the medium of the mind. The reciprocal influence between the mind and body will exasperate the disease which may have been commenced in either, and render its effects upon the

system doubly pernicious.

Of all amusements that prove ruinous to health, dancing will be the first to claim our attention, inasmuch as its influence is the most extensive. If kept within limits of moderation dancing would be an agreeable pastime as well as healthful exercise; but such is not the case— every thing in this country is managed on a "prodigious great scale". The day does not afford time enough to enjoy this fascinating recreation, but by some strange phantasy of deluded mortals the order of nature has been in a great measure reversed. That portion of time designed by the Author of all good for retirement and sleep, is occupied in fatiguing exercise and dissipation, dignified with the mollifying appellation of innocent amusement. Aside from unseasonable hours, there are other evils attend

ant upon dancing; not the least of which is the fatigue consequent upon so severe exercise. Persons who in ordinary life are generally indolent & inactive, will, at the ball or cotillion party, tax the strength of their systems to the utmost. Such persons are unable to bear much fatigue — but of such character dancing parties are generally composed; who, as soon as they become weary, seek to reinvigorate their systems by taking some cordial or stimulating drink. This, for a short time, answers the purpose admirably well; but recourse must soon be had to the same remedy, the common fountain of hilarity and vigour. At length poor, jaded nature, spurred and goaded on to such excess, sinks exhausted.

On these occasions too, the dress must be light that it may not impede motion, and also that it may the better display a grace-

ful form. The wearer of this dress dances till perspiration breaks out profusely, then at some window courts the refreshing breeze. The effects consequent upon the exposure of oneself to a current of air, when in a state of perspiration are to be dreaded at any time; but much more so when a delicate female, after severe exercise to which she is a stranger and thinly clad, thus places her health and life in jeopardy. If none but the robust and vigorous were to engage in this pastime, the consequences would be less serious; but the feeble and delicate constitutions of most of our females cannot endure this exercise with impunity; and we have to lament that many of the fairest specimens of female loveliness fall victims to this popular and agreeable recreation.

Were dancing confined exclusively to the young our strictures would require to be

less pointed; but—

— — — "Dames of ancient days
Have led their children thro' the mirthful maze;
And the gey grandsire, skilled in gestic lore,
Has footed beneath the burden of three-score."

The effects on the mind of some circumstances attending dancing, tho' not so conspicuous at first, never fail to become manifest in action. The febrile excitement during the stage of preparation for a dancing party, produced by an absorbing and passionate desire of making a brilliant display, is little calculated to place the system in such a state as to endure the fatigue of a ball with impunity. During this stage too, the appetite is impaired or wholly destroyed, sleep is interrupted a certain train of what are called nervous symptoms are sure to ensue. On such occasions young females are wholly devoted to the exer-

cise of their skill in the art of pleasing and making captives, and conquests among the opposite sex. Where the interests of so many are concerned in accomplishing the same object, some, of course, must meet with disappointment — then ensue jealousy, envy, and all the rankling passions that rivalry can excite; all of which contribute, in a greater or less degree, directly to the injury of health.

"What numbers here would into fame advance,
Conscious of merit in the coxcomb dance!
The tavern, park, assembly, ball, or play,
Those dear destroyers of the texian day!
That wheel of fops, that saunter of the town,
Call it diversion and the pill goes down;
Fools grin on fools, and stare like, stupport,
Without one sight, the pleasures of a court."

Theatres. The frequent attendance upon theatres, proves not only undermining to the

constitution, but is also destructive to virtue and morality — two ingredients that render a character estimable, besides being the chief pillars that support our Republican Government. As with dancing so with attending Theatres, there are circumstances which operate as causes in producing disease; among which may be reckoned the late hour at which theatre-going people seek to "steep their senses in forgetfulness". The mere witnessing a tragical performance produces such a feeble excitement or mental commotion as generally to forbid any approach of the drowsy God; thus the night is passed in restlessness and disquiet. But if perchance one in this condition do happen to fall into a slumber, his sleep is short and unrefreshing, being often interrupted by dreams of the most unpleasant and disagreeable nature. This may be

denied by the friends of Theatres; but the anxious and sleepy looks depicted in their pale countenances, their loss of appetite etc, show that the wonted tranquillity of their minds has been disturbed, and that they have not received the accustomed visits of "tired Nature's sweet restorer".

The contaminated atmosphere of a crowded Theatre is another cause that operates injuriously on the health. That part of the air necessary to perform the function of respiration becomes consumed or deteriorated; and in lieu of it there is generated a gas unrespirable and deleterious. Added to this, there is the natural exhalation from the lungs of a multitude in almost every state and stage of disease. What Lady who makes the slightest pretension to refinement would think of sitting tête a tête, with a grog-buster and inhaling

his breath? or with a tobacco-chewer, or smoker, or one whose mouth is filled with decayed teeth - or one whose breath is polluted with a loathsome disease? Such a proposition could not fail to shock the delicate sensibility of almost any one of the gentler sex. Yet, every lady who attends a theatre does all this, and even more. Not only is the air in the room of a play-house contaminated by exhalations from the lungs, but almost every person, under the circumstances we are considering, perspires more or less freely - thereby increasing the evil in a two-fold proportion. Exchanging this heated apartment for the open air, operates, sometimes, fatally to health. If the room be not too warm, it is often uncomfortably cold - the effects in this case are equally bad.

The mind is operated upon in various ways. Sometimes the spectator is overwhelmed with

grief, and again elated with joy. The effect of the depressing passions is always injurious, while that of the opposite class may be different.

"Tragedies excite virtuous sympathies in the minds of spectators but do not excite to virtuous actions. The mind when thus excited reacts upon itself, from its feeling having no vent in virtuous actions. The feelings of some people who are accustomed to restrain them, frequently prompts them to action. Tragedies do not excite active sympathy, as is evident from the conduct of those who attend them most. A Lady who will sob for hours over the Hero or Heroine of a Tragedy, will often deny her servants even the comforts of life, and will listen unmoved to a half Starved family who have been ruined by famine or war. The distresses in Tragedies are painted so much above what occurs in real life, that

the sympathy of the spectator becomes incapable of being excited by real distress."

It is not our province in this place to speak of the evils done to society by the tendency theatres have to corrupt the morals and debase the taste of the age.

Sedentary amusements, notwithstanding the many warm friends they may have both among the male and female sexes, are yet inimical to health and happiness. Of this species of amusement card-playing deserves the first notice, inasmuch as it has charms superior to all other games of the kind, and a more bewitching influence over the youthful mind. We care not for any argument that may be urged in favour of its innocence since proof enough can be adduced to show the positive evil resulting from card-playing.

By indulgence in a passionate fondness for this game that exercise to necessary to health and a free flow of spirits is neglected; digestion is imperfectly performed, the appetite becomes impaired, and the hours that nature has allotted for sleep are spent around the gaming-table in watchfulness and mental commotion. Card-playing is carried thus far by way of amusement; but here the evil does not stop; cards are often used for the purpose of gambling, and then the effects are much more lamentable. The mental agitation and want of necessary repose of one night is followed by febrile excitement the succeeding day; thus the mind acts upon the body, which, in its turn, is excited to reaction. The reciprocal influence between the mind and the body, thus produced and kept up, often terminates in mental alienation,

or more complete mania. In this state, the unhappy gambler may linger out a worthless existence amid the gloom of despair, or the sufferer may terminate his sad condition by committing the rash act of suicide.
Tho' card-playing does not always lead to this unhappy issue, yet when practised only as an amusement a great degree of firmness and resolution is required to withstand its charms.
The system requires regularity in habits of exercise, diet, sleep etc, but a regard for all these salutary habits is sacrificed to the pleasures of whist.
Novel-reading should not be passed over in silence; but the above remarks are more or less applicable in this case, as well as to all other amusements of a sedentary nature; and of course need not a repetition.

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